

Miscellaneous Notes

1. HABITS OF THE RHESUS MACAQUE *MACACA MULATTA* (ZIMMERMANN) IN THE SUNDERBANS, 24-PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL

The habits of the Rhesus macaque in the Sunderbans have not yet been recorded. In the course of faunistic surveys conducted during the years 1955-1960 A.K.M. had the opportunity of studying the habits of this monkey which appear to differ from its habits in other parts of West Bengal.

In the extensive mangrove forests of the Sunderbans, which thrive in the numerous swamp deltas facing the Bay of Bengal, the Rhesus has established itself under conditions normally unfavourable to Primate life, namely the absence of fresh water, the submergence of the greater parts of the islands in the spring tides, the soft, muddy, and slippery soil, cyclonic conditions especially during the summer and monsoon, etc. Its predators are terrestrial, arboreal, and aquatic, e.g. the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), the Python (*Python molurus*), the Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodilus porosus*), and sharks, which include the Wolf Shark (*Alopynus vulpinus*) and the Man-eating Shark (*Carcharinus gangeticus*).

Observations were made in the low mangrove forests [Forest type 1 S/2 (a) of Champion (1936, p. 103)], mostly in the Basirhat Reserve Forest in Arbesi, Jhilla, Harinbhanga, Khatuajhuri, and other adjoining forest blocks along the East Pakistan border. The population of the Rhesus appeared to decrease from east to west.

The troupes consist of 20 to 30 individuals. Solitary individuals are also noticed. They are not very common, and perhaps represent exiled males. Each troupe occupies a territory, generally a complete forest block in an island, but in large islands there are more than one troupe. They are shy and avoid human approach by moving away into the deeper parts of the forests, and never show any aggressive attitude. They are almost entirely arboreal, rarely descending to the ground except during cyclonic weather, when they take shelter in long grass or under Hental (*Phoenix paludosa*) palms and sometimes on the lower branches of large trees. They avoid swimming in the saline backwater. However, in search of food, some are found to move on mud-flats and sometimes a troupe may boldly swim across creeks at ebb tide and move into the nearest reclaimed area to feed on

standing crops. Their food in the forest consists of the pods, leaves, and fruit of Garjan (*Rhizophora conjugata*), Goran (*Cerriops* spp.), Golpata (*Nipa fruticans*), Baen (*Avicennia alba*), Bhaila (*Azzeria bijuga*), Gengwa (*Excaecaria agallocha*), etc. The fruit and leaves of Keora (*Sonneratia apetala*), however, constitute the principal fodder for the monkeys, and are shared with Spotted Deer (*Axis axis*), which feed on the leaves and fruits dropped by the monkeys. Further, their vigilance and alarm calls save the deer from predators. We have found the monkeys eating crabs, which are commonly seen in the puddles of water during the ebb tide. We have not seen them catching fish, although local fishermen report that they catch fish. Mushrooms are also included in their menu. Water is obtained by licking dew deposited on leaves, and by eating succulent leathery leaves and long juicy grasses growing on the river flats.

The taxonomic status of the Sunderban Rhesus is not definite. Anderson (1872) referred to a specimen from the Sunderbans as a supposed new monkey, and Khajuria (1954, p. 113) while listing them under the nominate race pointed out that they differ in texture and coloration. The authors observed that in life the Rhesus in the Sunderbans is duller as compared with those from other parts of West Bengal. The orange-red fur on its loins and rump is rather inconspicuous.

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- CHAMPION, H. G. (1936): A preliminary survey of the forest types of India and Burma. *Indian For. Rec. (N.S.), Sylviculture* 1: 1-286.
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2. WILD DOGS (*CUON ALPINUS*) AND VILLAGE DOGS

We reached our land by Sigur River in the lower plateau of the Nilgiris late in the evening on 31-10-1964. There was a herd of cheetal about 100 yards away. Seeing us they stopped grazing and looked at the car curiously in typical cheetal fashion. As we were